

From: "annav03@aol.com%inter2" <annav03@aol.com>
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Email: annav03@aol.com

FirstName: Anna

LastName: Viel

Address1:

Address2:

City:

State:

zipcode:

Question1:

Question2: With the increase in prices of fossil fuels that will undoubtedly continue over the next decade or two, I believe the nation's best interest would be served by concentrating on strengthening our domestic market. A transition to more diverse agriculture on a smaller, more local scale in the US would both decrease our reliance on the imports of other countries, and increase the demand within the US for goods grown here. Ignoring the fact that international trade will be getting much more expensive will likely catch up to us, until it becomes very difficult to afford the prices of food that result from very high shipping costs from out of the country.

Question3: The arguments mentioned above are undeniably true. Of course a system that rewards farmers based on the levels of production are going to encourage larger farms, as well as the genetic engineering and pesticides that are required to make such farms feasible. I believe market incentives should be used to encourage farming on a more local scale; for instance, farmers should be rewarded when their food travels under a certain mileage every year. Farm size or production amount should NOT be the main determinants of program benefits. Program incentives definitely lead to lower market prices, but that is because the incentives are innappropriately distributed. If smaller farmers were given more incentives, their food would become more affordable and our nation's food system could begin converting to a more local one. Not only would this shift be important from an environmental standpoint, but it would improve the economy of the United States by reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, distributing wealth better, and decreasing the monopolies of dishonest companies (such as Wal-Mart) that are able to sell cheap produce because they corner the market and know where to find large-scale producers who rely on government incentives to make most of their money.

Question4: Again, I will re-iterate that the partial solution to a lot of these problems would be shifting incentives to benefit small farmers. Encouraging organic farming through incentives would further contribute to keeping our natural resources cleaner. Of course, small, diverse farms would also decrease the need for international and long distance shipping in many cases, a fact that will improve environmental health on an even broader scale than local water and air standards since emissions from shipping travel a long distance.

Question5:

Question6: There should be an effort to diversify the gene pool of US crops. Organics, to be cliché, are the wave of the future and should certainly not be ignored. If the USDA is serious about protecting the environment, organics are what should be focused on most. In general, organic farms are smaller and more localized, which would again decrease reliance on fossil fuels as well as decrease pollution. And what a novel idea to pay attention to product quality... although I do hope this quality refers to the taste and nutritional value of the food, as

opposed to its flawless appearance and long shelf-life. It's time for the primary produce in this country to be high in nutrients, flavorful, and importantly, affordable for everyone. It is a form of environmental injustice that healthy, nutritious produce is only available to the small population that can afford it. This is yet another reason why small, local and organic farms are in need of greater governmental incentives. This would allow them to sell their produce at lower prices and make them available to everyone. Food (like meat and produce) needs to stop being considered a commodity. Rather, and in fact, it is a means for nourishing our children, reducing national obesity caused by lower-priced "snacks", and contributing to the rich and flavorful cultural cuisine found in our great country. Respect food, and respect those who eat it, instead of focusing energies on economics. Thanks for your time in reading and considering the arguments I have presented. I do hope they will be considered and taken to heart.